

I am writing to express my opinion that this issue needs a much broader public hearing than has been given so far. Despite reading a local and a national newspaper every day and watching local and cable news programs every day, and reading a national news magazine every week, I only learned the news of the media ownership regulations being relaxed yet again while browsing on the internet! Despite this issue being of critical interest to the general public, the major media outlets have not seen fit to report on it. Obviously the few giant media companies that control the news we see are interested in keeping the public out of this debate because they want even more power. To me this is clear evidence that the already reduced regulations have led the media to feel free to ignore their public service responsibilities.

A few companies shouldn't be allowed to have such vertical and horizontal control of the airwaves and newspapers. The airwaves belong to the public, and the media companies can make a profit off it, but apparently they need the fear losing their license to remember their public service obligations and to keep them honest. They lost that fear the last time the regulations were relaxed and now I fear that further consolidation of the media is a real threat to a functioning democracy. I recommend that you strengthen the regulations on ownership, not lessen them even more. As we have seen in the energy deregulation debacle in California, a lack of rules invites the unscrupulous. I believe in free markets, but I don't think free markets means no regulations when you are talking about vital public services such as communications and energy.

I could give more examples of important information being ignored by the mainstream media that I have learned about on the internet, but I think the example I gave of not even covering news that affects them is the most telling on the issue of corporate interests controlling what the general public learns about and how these giant corporate interests are illegitimately using their power to shape public opinion or keep the public ignorant of important public policy issues.

Please don't dismiss my point by arguing that my example proves that the internet is an effective alternative. Searching out news on the internet that you aren't aware you should know about is impractical, entirely too time consuming for the average person, and ignores the FCC's responsibility to ensure that the media meets its public service obligations in return for making a profit off the public airwaves. The internet is great for finding out more detailed information about a subject once the issue has been brought to one's attention, but it is the obligation of the media to investigate and at least notify people of the important issues being debated by the government.